

Nancy Johnson



Fifth District, Connecticut

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Contact: Brian Schubert

(202) 225-4476

More Seniors Save Money with Medicare Rx Benefit

*Plainville Couple Saves \$5,000 Thru AARP-Endorsed Benefit
Salisbury Senior Has "Words of Encouragement" for Others*

Federal, State Officials Help at Plainville Senior Center

PLAINVILLE, CT – More seniors in Connecticut learned they can save hundreds and thousands of dollars on the high cost of their prescription medicines through the new Medicare drug benefit, said Congresswoman Nancy Johnson on Tuesday. One couple from Plainville met with a Medicare counselor yesterday at the local senior center and learned they will save \$5,000 a year.

"Every day more and more seniors are learning the new Medicare drug benefit can save them money," Johnson said. "Seniors in Plainville learned they can save money on the high cost of their drugs, and many others in Connecticut can too."

The new Medicare drug benefit is voluntary and endorsed by AARP, the nation's largest seniors organization. Seniors can sign up now, and the benefit takes effect Jan. 1, 2006. Officials from the Connecticut Department of Social Services and the Medicare program met with seniors one-on-one Monday at the Plainville Senior Center to answer their questions on the new drug benefits.

Mrs. Anita Willequer, 70, of Plainville stopped by the senior center today for her exercise class. While there, she took the time to meet with a counselor. She learned that her monthly drug costs will fall from \$50 to \$5 a month, for a yearly savings of \$540 a year.

Mrs. Willequer, who takes blood pressure medication, said the one-on-one counseling she received at the senior center answered her questions about the Medicare drug benefit.

"There's a tremendous savings with the Medicare drug benefit," Mrs. Willequer said. "I was very pleased and I was glad I asked about it. I hope the Medicare drug benefit helps a lot of people."

Mr. Thomas Bernatchy, 81, of Plainville, also met with a Medicare counselor for 30 minutes this morning. He said the drugs his wife Margaret, 77, takes costs \$600 a month. She was signed up for a drug plan that will save her and her husband \$400 a month, or \$4,800 a year.

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Mr. Bernatchy also signed up for the Medicare benefit even though his drug bills are small.

“I signed up because although my costs are low right now, I want to be prepared if they go up,” Mr. Bernatchy said.

On the other side of the 5th District, The Lakeville Journal reported that one senior from Salisbury had “words of encouragement” for his fellow seniors after having success in signing up for the drug benefit. Mr. Joe Soper, 73, of Salisbury said he and his wife, Lucy, take seven medications, and they are expensive, he said, according to the newspaper.

Rhonda Guberman, the Assistant Director of the Plainville Senior Center, said seniors received needed help today, and that there are many others who still have questions about the Medicare drug benefit.

“It was terrific today,” Guberman said. “There were people who are going to save money.”

Guberman said not all seniors realize that if they are on Medicare, they can sign up for the drug benefit.

“Some people believe it’s not for them,” she said. “We’re saying, ‘this is for you. It’s available to everyone with Medicare.’”

Below are some of the resources available to seniors who have questions about the voluntary, AARP-endorsed Medicare drug benefit:

- **Call** Connecticut’s CHOICES program toll-free at 1-(800) 994-9422. CHOICES is a public state program, and its counselors are trained and certified to answer any question on the new Medicare drug benefit, particularly questions about ConnPACE and Medicaid.
- **Call** a Medicare counselor toll-free at 1-(800) MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227). They are trained to answer all of your Medicare questions. Or visit Medicare’s website: www.medicare.gov. There you can compare drug plans and sign up for the new drug benefit directly.
- **Call** your local non-profit Agency on Aging, where you can talk to a trained counselor who can help. The phone number for the Agency on Aging nearest you is below.
 - Meriden residents can call the South Central Connecticut Area Agency on Aging at (203) 785-8533.
 - New Britain, Plainville and Farmington Valley residents can call the North Central Area Agency on Aging at (860) 724-6443.
 - Waterbury, Danbury, and Litchfield County residents, as well those living along the I-84 corridor can contact the Western Connecticut Area Agency on Aging at (203) 757-5449.